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## BLOODBATH: 6 killed in Rivers, 2 shot in Jos •US, UK, Canada, Germany place citizens on alert

Written by Bolaji Ogundele, Isaac Shobayo, Ayodele Adesanmi and Christian Okeke

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Wednesday, 29 December 2010

CRISIS reverberated in two communities in Rivers State and left six people dead on Tuesday with about 20 houses said to have been burnt in the process.

This is just as two youths, in a confrontation with members of the Special Task Force (STF), were shot in Jos, the Plateau State capital.

The six people were said to have died in a fresh clash between K-Dere and B-Dere villages in Gokana Local Government Area of Rivers State on Tuesday.

The state government has, however, called for calm from the two sides, even as it has set up a commission of inquiry to look into the causes of the intractable crisis, which has claimed several lives over time.

Nigerian Tribune gathered that the latest assault was a retaliatory one at about 6.00 a.m. on Tuesday by armed youths of K-Dere, whose village had been attacked last week by their neighbours.

Entering B-Dere, the rampaging attackers reportedly started shooting indiscriminately, setting houses on fire, thereby causing panic, which made the inhabitants to flee to neighbouring villages and bushes for safety.

According to sources, the latest attack claimed about six lives, with several others sustaining injuries and some 20 houses burnt.

It was also gathered that the two villages were virtually deserted as residents continued to flee for fear of attack. The situation is also spreading to surrounding communities where fears are high that the fighting might spread to their domains.

When reached for confirmation, the Police Public Relations Officer of the Rivers State Police Command, Dr Rita Inoma-Abbey (SP), said the command was yet to put a casualty estimate together.

“Actually, the K-Dere people were the aggressors this time round. From what we gathered, they entered B-Dere about 6.00 a.m., started shooting sporadically and burning houses. We do not have an estimate of casualty yet,” Inoma-Abbey said.

Meanwhile, Governor Rotimi Amaechi, in a statement by his Press Secretary, Blessing Wikina, said the state government “had received with sadness news of continued violence and wanton destruction of life and property in the affected communities, despite an earlier call on them to desist from further hostilities.

“Government wishes to state that a judicial commission of inquiry has been constituted and inaugurated to look into the immediate and remote causes of the

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It said any group of persons or community that flouted the directive would be held responsible in accordance with the law.

“The state government has, therefore, called upon the people of both communities to give peace a chance as the commission has been given sweeping powers to deal with the situation,” the statement said.

Also, there was pandemonium in Jos on Tuesday, following a clash between men of the Special Task Force (STF) and youths of Gada-Biu, in Jos North Local Government Area of Plateau State with two youths shot in the process.

This is just as the Council of Ulama, Plateau State, has denied any link with a group, Jama'tattu Ahlus Sunnah Liddaa'awatti Jihad, which claimed responsibility for the Christmas eve bomb blasts in Jos, and some attacks in some parts of Borno State.

The Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) has also declared that the statement of the Jihad group was a confirmation that Boko Haram was responsible for the bombing of places in Jos.

Nigerian Tribune learnt that the youth, in their hundreds, staged a protest over what they called extra-judicial killings by the men of the STF and in the confusion that followed, two youths were shot by the STF men.

The youth marched to the state police command, shouting anti-STF slogans and were later pacified by the state Commissioner of Police, Mr Abdulrahman Akano, who pleaded with the aggrieved youth.

Mr Akano later told newsmen that a soldier was in the custody of the police but did not mention if he was one of those who shot at the youth at Gada-Biu area of the city.

Meanwhile, activities remained paralysed in Jos as most residents still remained indoors for fear of being attacked.

The spokesman for the Council of Ulama, Plateau State, Alhaji Sani Mudi, in an interview with newsmen, expressed doubt if the Jihad group had any link with any established Islamic organisation both within and outside Jos.

“I don't think it is a credible group or that it has any link with any established Islamic organisation either in Jos or outside.”

According to him, the opening sentence of the statement by the group did not reflect something that was truly Islamic, adding that the way they described Allah was not the way Muslims described him in Islam, adding that it was a fundamental thing that was clear to every Muslim.

Speaking with the Nigerian Tribune, the chairman of CAN, North-Central, Reverend Yakubu Pam, said the statement of the Jihad group confirmed the speculation that Boko Haram was responsible for the explosions.

Reverend Pam said the game plan of the perpetrators was to provoke the Christians to react and tempt them to fight the Muslims, so that there could be full scale crisis again in the state.

He charged the people of Plateau State and Nigeria to condemn the current act of terrorism gradually gaining ground in the country, adding that the government should be alive to its responsibilities.

#### US, UK, others place citizens on alert

In a related development, it appeared that some foreign missions in the country have issued a full alert, warning their citizens to be cautious as suspense and fears continue to envelop Plateau and Borno states.

The missions, according to investigations by the Nigerian Tribune, may be considering advising their citizens to quit the areas, should more violence continue.

Though this was not the first time that violence, with attendant deaths and injuries, was engulfing the areas, it was gathered that the rumours of possible escalation to other areas, worsened by the reports that the security agencies got wind of the imminent crises, yet failed to prevent it, might inform the next step to be taken by the missions.

Already, the United States Embassy, through its ambassador, Terrence McCulley, had issued a message advising US citizens in the affected regions to remain vigilant, even as it would continue to monitor events in the area.

According to the embassy, "we appreciate the comments made on Saturday by President Goodluck Jonathan and other Nigerian leaders. The Federal Government, as well as state and local officials, should ensure perpetrators of these violent acts are brought swiftly to justice.

"At the same time, we trust that Nigerian security officials will exercise appropriate restraint and show respect for human rights as they strive to promote peace, security, and the rule of law."

Though the Nigerian Tribune could not confirm from the other missions in Abuja concerning the red alert to their citizens due to the public holidays, it was reliably gathered that missions like Canada, Germany and Britain, as well as diplomatic organs like those of the United Nations, had equally alerted their citizens.

#### **Victims get relief materials**

The National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) has disclosed that many lives were saved from the recent bomb blasts in Jos, while relief materials and drugs were adequately provided to victims through the effort of response agencies.

The Director-General of NEMA, Muhammad Sani-Sidi, who disclosed this on Tuesday, at a stakeholders' meeting with response agencies in Jos, during a preliminary assessment of the bomb blasts in the town, said considering the crowded places where the bombs were exploded, the timely interventions of response agencies and volunteers reduced casualties.

Sani-Sidi said while the agency was not a full-fledged security outfit, it complemented the activities of response agencies with humanitarian and logistic support, to alleviate the suffering of victims of natural and man-induced disasters.

The NEMA boss regretted that the country did not have a national contingency plan for proper coordination of emergency management, adding that the agency would soon convene a stakeholders' meeting to develop the strategy for disaster management.

The NEMA team also paid a visit to the state governor, Jonah Jang and hospitals where some of the victims were receiving treatment.

#### **'Police to ascertain suspects' status'**

The police are expected to ascertain whether the three suspects arrested in connection with the Christmas Eve bomb blasts in Jos are members of an Islamic group which has claimed responsibility for the attack.

Media Officer, Special Task Force on Jos crisis, Captain Charles Nweocha, told the News Agency of Nigeria (NAN), on Tuesday, that the three suspects, arrested at Giring (Abattoir) on Sunday, had been handed over to the police for further investigation.

He said the suspects, Sabiu Yusuf, 24; Ismail Garga, 24 and Sirajo Mohamadu, 24, of Niger nationality, were currently helping the police in their investigations.

A group, Jama'atu Ahlus-Sunnah Lidda'awati wal Jihad, on Monday, claimed responsibility for the multiple bomb blasts on its website.

"It is only the police that can determine whether the suspects belong to the group which has claimed responsibility for the blasts.

"The task force has done its job in apprehending them and has since handed them over to the police.

"When the police conclude their investigations, they will do what is necessary and expected of them," Nweocha said.

#### **'Bombings must be investigated'**

Meanwhile, the Nigerian Peoples Congress (NPC) and the Citizens Popular Party (CPP) have called on the Federal Government to investigate what it termed senseless killing of innocent Nigerians in Jos and prosecute those involved in the act.

NPC, in a statement made available to the Nigerian Tribune, in Abuja, said it was shocked by the recent bomb blasts in Jos, describing the incident as the height of rascality, irresponsibility and sadism.

Also, the CPP, in a statement signed by its national chairman, Mr Maxi Okwu, described it as outrageous and a wicked Christmas gift to the people of the state. Gbagbo's officials were not immediately available to comment after the meeting.

The three presidents, Yayi from Benin Republic; Ernest Bai Koroma from Sierra Leone and Pedro Pires from Cape Verde, were due to meet Ouattara later in the day.

Gbagbo's camp originally said it would welcome the visiting leaders "as brothers and friends, and listen to the message they have to convey," but, shortly before the meeting, his government warned it would not tolerate any meddling in its affairs.

"Let's avoid political delinquency. No international institution has the right to intervene by force to impose a president in a sovereign state," government spokesman, Ahoua Don Melo, told the BBC when asked if Gbagbo would leave.

After several days of calm, sporadic gunfire was heard on Tuesday morning in the Abidjan neighbourhood of Abobo, a stronghold of Ouattara supporters.

A Reuters witness said police were chasing youths trying to set up barricades with burning tyres. It was not known if there were any casualties.

A planned mass rally, on Wednesday, by the pro-Gbagbo "Young Patriot" movement, led by firebrand Charles Ble Goude, who is also youth minister in the Gbagbo government, was suspended to allow for negotiations.

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